



Blue Lake Set To Break Ground On Shakespearean Theater

Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, credited by Governor Jennifer Granholm earlier this year as “the largest provider of arts education to Michigan Children and Youth,” will launch a new Shakespeare program in its 2010 summer season. In addition to offering a Shakespeare major, the program will ensure that each of the more than 5,300 students attending Blue Lake will be exposed to a live Shakespeare presentation while at camp.

At the heart of the program is construction of a 600 seat Elizabethan theater, designed by Muskegon architect Dick Borgeson. Borgeson and Blue Lake Management Committee Member Andy Dagen, have been developing plans for the construction project for more than 2 years.

According to Borgeson, “This is a once in a lifetime program for an architect to work on with such historical significance. It is great to have a group of dedicated people at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp who not only understand the historic nature of this project, but are willing to do everything possible to maintain its pure architectural value. I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this prestigious initiative.”

Andy Dagen, whose responsibilities include maintaining the more than 300 buildings that make up Blue Lake’s physical plant, added: “The opportunity for our students to study and perform Shakespeare within an authentic Elizabethan theater is unique. This will be the only summer camp program of its type in the nation and there is a great deal of anticipation by our faculty and staff.”

The history of the Elizabethan Theater Era, which ran from 1558 to 1642, started with wandering minstrels who moved from castle to castle. The popularity of the movement led to the construction of the first dedicated theater in 1576 by James Burbage. Dubbed “The Theater”, the structure was built in a similar style to a Roman Coliseum, but on a smaller scale. Other theaters followed, including “The Curtain”, “The Swan”, and “The Rose”, for which Blue Lake’s theater has been tentatively named. The construction design of Blue Lake’s theater is a synthesis of these various theaters, based on drawings from the time period.

The \$300,000 project is being largely funded by an anonymous donor. According to Dagen, “we are accepting additional donations and support is appreciated. Because lead funding is coming from an anonymous source, it is possible to name the theater in honor of an additional benefactor.”

Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, one of the areas largest employers during its summer season, will utilize local sub contractors for construction of the project. For information on construction bidding, contact Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds Andy Dagen at 231-894-1966.

History of the Elizabethan Theatre

The History of the Elizabethan Theatre started with the wandering minstrels who moved from one castle and town to the next. Any strangers were treated with suspicion during the Elizabethan era, and this also applied to wandering actors, especially when many horrific outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague were occurring. The reputations of Elizabethan actors were that of vagabonds and thieves. Traveling throughout the era was restricted and required a license. Regulations restricting actors soon followed and Licenses were granted to the nobles of England for the maintenance of troupes of players. Thus the Elizabethan Acting Troupes were formed and the History of the Elizabethan Theatre started!

The Inn-yards

The traveling actors played to their audiences in the courtyards of taverns - called inn-yards. Temporary stages had to be erected and the actors moved around from one venue to the next. The biggest of the Inn-yards had a maximum capacity of 500 people. There were no purpose built theaters until 1576 when a theatrical entrepreneur called James Burbage (father of the actor, Richard Burbage) decided to capitalize on the growing popularity of plays. James Burbage obtained a lease and permission to build "The Theatre" in Shoreditch, London. The Lord Chamberlain's Men use it from 1594 to 1596 and thus begins of the History of the Elizabethan Theatre.

The Amphitheaters

"The Theatre" was built in a similar style to the Roman Coliseum, but on a smaller scale. The Elizabethan amphitheatre was designed to hold a capacity of up to 3000 people! Similar amphitheatres were later built to house blood sports, such as bear beating at the "Bear Garden" and Bull Beating at the "Bull Ring." In 1577, another open-air amphitheatre called "The Curtain" opens in Finsbury Fields in Shoreditch, London, followed by "The Rose" in 1587.

The Bubonic Plague

During the Elizabethan era there were constant outbreaks of the deadly Bubonic Plague (the Black Death). The large audiences who were attracted to the massive theaters posed a real health hazard to the largely populated City of London and in 1593 theatres were closed due to the Bubonic Plague.

London's authorities ban plays in the City of London

The major outbreak of the Bubonic Plague and the rowdy crowds attracted by the theaters were causing real problems in the City of London. Many Londoners were strict Protestants - Puritans in fact, who abhorred the theatres and many of the people they attracted. Objections to the theaters escalated from the Church and the City of London officials. Respectable London citizens added even more objections about the rise in crime and the bawdy nature of some of the plays, fighting, drinking not to mention the risk of so many people and the spread of the Bubonic Plague! Finally, in 1596, London's authorities were unwilling to ignore the growing complaints any longer and the public presentation of plays and all theaters within the city limits of London were banned. All theaters located in the city were forced to move to the south side of the River Thames, outside the City of London limits.

The Globe Theatre

In 1599, the Globe Theatre is opened on Bankside - to the south of London. William

Shakespeare is a co-owner of the Globe and a prolific writer of plays. The Globe Theater is a huge success. Winter performances are staged in indoor theaters called playhouses.

The Bubonic Plague strikes again!

In 1603, the Bubonic Plague (the Black Death) again ravages London killing 33,000 people and all theatres are closed until the deadly outbreak subsides.

Fire at the Globe

On June 29, 1613, a huge fire broke out at the Globe Theatre. It was started by the firing of a cannon during one of the plays! In 1614, the Globe Theatre was rebuilt on original foundations, but this time the roof was tiled, not thatched! William Shakespeare dies on April 25, 1616.

The English Civil War and the Puritans

In 1642, the English Civil War breaks out between the Parliamentarians (Puritans) and the Royalists and on September 2, 1642, the Puritan Parliament issues an ordinance suppressing all stage plays. The Puritans demolish the Globe Theatre in 1644. In 1647, even stricter rules are passed by the Puritans restricting the staging of plays. In 1648, the Puritans order that all playhouses and theatres are to be pulled down, all players are to be seized and whipped, and anyone caught attending a play is to be fined five shillings. In 1649, the Civil War finally leads to the terrible execution of King Charles I by the Parliamentarians. The Elizabethan theater is halted until 1658 when Oliver Cromwell dies and the power of the Puritans starts to decline. In 1660, King Charles II is restored to the throne of England. The Restoration, and the demise in the power of the Puritans, sees the opening of the theatres once again.